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ABSTRACT

The Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities has operated a four-state teacher preparation program since 1973. This program offeres an education to inmates, ex-offenders, correctional officers, and community members. It was established because (a) prisoners rejoin the community in about four years; (b) ex-offenders need new life patterns on release in order to break the cycle of crime and arrest; (c) confinement costs are high, and inmates are usually nonproductive; and (d) our current correctional system is not working. The union emphasizes teacher preparation (a) in order to address inequities of traditionally barring ex-offenders from teaching; (b) because ex-offenders often have special qualifications, particularly in relating to low socioeconomic class students; and (c) so that preservice students will learn by teaching inmates who need to develop basic skills or pass high school equivalency tests. The program has demonstrated that (a) it can assist students to develop effective teaching skills, especially for problem learners; (b) students and inmates will be able to benefit their communities in needy areas; and (c) the program can succeed even within the constraints of the penal system. (PB)

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Alternative Education and Corrections: Some New Dimensions

by Lee Roy Black

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Introduction

Inmates of correctional institutions and ex-offenders are becoming certified teachers in their institutions and in regular public school systems. It may seem paradoxical or even absurd, but education and training which equips these persons to become professional teachers can be eminently sensible, and is one of the current thrusts in a gradual attempt to change the American correctional system. The Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, with funding from the Teacher Corps of the U.S. Office of Education, has been operating a four-state teacher-preparation program in cooperation with state and federal correctional authorities for the past two years.[1] Through University Without Walls units at four Union member institutions,[2] the program has offered a new kind of baccalaureate education to inmates, ex-offenders, correctional officers, and community persons. The following discussion focuses on the special aspects of involving persons who are institutionalized, the rationale for so doing, and some of the UECU's plans to have an impact on the administration of the criminal justice system.

Program Rationale

The public's conception of the role and functions of the correctional system, the general stereotype of those nameless masses who are incarcerated, and the average person's lack of knowledge about the direct effects of the correctional system on himself, make it necessary to justify educational programs for law violators. There are, of course, the compelling humanistic arguments of compassion, one's ability to learn from mistakes, and the appalling waste of human potential behind the walls. There is a vaguely-couched conviction that education is improvement, that it is the key to rehabilitation, and that we should therefore adapt it to protect society as well as to improve the students. However, there are those, mistaken in my opinion, who argue that punishment, control, and permanent isolation from society are the answers to the problem.

Rather than debate these positions, let us examine what is now happening, and draw our conclusions accordingly. First, the fact is that people who are imprisoned do not disappear from the rest of society, but rejoin the community in an average time of four years (See President's Commission on Law Enforcement). Incarceration itself is no solution if it must be repeated on a schedule similar to electing a president.

Second, an ex-offender needs to set a different pattern of life for himself upon release if he is to break the cycle of crime and arrest in order to become

[1]State and Federal Correctional Institutions: Colorado, Canon City & Golden Colorado (Camp. Geo. West); Maryland Correctional Training Center, Maryland Correctional Camp Center, and Maryland Correctional Center for Women in Jessup, Maryland; Federal Correctional Facility at Sandstone, Minnesota, Operation De-Nova, pre-trial diversionary program run by Hennepin County based in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Adult Correctional Institution in Providence, Rhode Island.

[2]Loretto Heights College, Denver, Colorado; Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Roger Williams College, Providence, Rhode Island.

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a recognized member of society. Yet his limited skills, knowledge, experiences, and opportunities in socially acceptable areas typically pressure him back into unacceptable patterns of behavior, which return him to the criminal justice system as a recidivist.[3] He needs the tools with which to fashion a different lifestyle or he threatens himself and his community, and burdens the police and courts.

Third, apart from humanistic considerations, there are heavy costs to keeping people confined. To institutionalize a person totals up to $15,000 a year, not including hidden costs such as buildings and grounds which almost doubles the figure (See Chanels, 1973). In addition, an inmate typically can make little contribution to society while confined, and instead of collecting tax from him, we are compelled to support him at a rate over twice the total income for an average family of four.

Finally, the evidence is clear and most professionals agree that our current correctional system is not working. Something must be done. Educational programs such as Newgate and PACE (Programmed Activities for Correctional Education) are well-researched efforts to provide continuity between learning in the institution and practice upon release to the community. Recidivism rates are far below the national average for program participants[4] and argue strongly for the viability and cost-efficiency of educational programs. Yet less than 4% of inmates are substantially involved in education (See McCollum, 1975), and many of these efforts are piecemeal. Clearly the educational options must be increased both in the interests of the would-be students and of society as a whole.

Why Teacher Preparation?

The above meaning does not explain the Union's emphasis in teacher-preparation, however. It has not traditionally been an accepted view that persons who have been convicted of crimes should later teach American young people. In fact, both written and unwritten laws have barred ex-offenders from teaching positions. The Union chose to address this inequity on behalf of ex-offenders and inmates, and to prepare candidates for such employment. The education and training provided enables them to break their previous patterns of behavior and attain respected positions in the service of the community.

Further, ex-offenders often have special qualifications which most professional teachers lack. For instance, many school systems are experiencing difficulty in employing teachers who relate well with large segments of the community, particularly in lower and lower-middle class areas. It is these areas, people, and more that many ex-offenders relate to best. They also have "street credibility" and "savvy" which allow them greater impact on student populations. With appropriate help, they might act not only as deterrents, but as positive educational and community resources with effectiveness far beyond that of a person who has not experienced growing up in the environment of these students.

Finally, the Union's program was set up in such a fashion that students preparing for teaching careers would immediately begin teaching inmates who needed to develop basic skills or pass high school equivalency tests. This involvement of clusters of incarcerated individuals maximized program efficiency, and began to make some small impact upon the lack of education options. At the same time it provided the experiential component to the teacher-education program which is so characteristic of all University Without Walls.

Program History and Context

The Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities is a consortium of 33 institutions which have come together to foster research, experimentation and change in higher education. Among it's activities, in 1971 it established the University Without Walls which now operates at thirty sites across the nation. The UWW, awarded candidacy for accreditation by the North Central Association in 1972, is built upon learner self-direction, recognition of previous learning, individualized learning styles and procedures, and use of facilitator/learners. It is committed to a different population than the traditional college (average mid-thirties), and has become directly concerned with providing alternative educational opportunities to able persons who are substantially disadvantaged under the standard system of courses and administrative requirements.

A number of UWW units had admitted inmates on an individual basis as part of general program activities, but an integrated effort was needed. In 1973, the Union's central staff committed itself to such an effort, and developed a proposal for the Teacher Corps under existing legislation (See Teacher Corps Public Law 90-35). The Union proposal was funded, and began in June, 1973 upon a program which introduced a new concept of teacher preparation. Activities were begun to help persons including inmates to gain the attitudes and skills needed to successfully function as a new kind of teacher, the facilitator/learner.

This UWW concept begins with the student rather than the subject matter, and makes him the focal point of an individually-designed learning program. The facilitator jointly plans the program with the student based on student abilities and goals, achieved knowledge and skill levels, the needs implied by student choices, resources available, and the constraints of schedule and commitments with which the student must deal. As a participant in the process, the facilitator assists the student in resource acquisition and supplies expertise directly, but does not simply function in a vertical-transmission-of-knowledge model.

[3]Two out of three ex-offenders are returned to correctional institutions within six months after released, *ibid.*

[4]*National Commission on Violence*, 1970

The facilitator also is a learner, and becomes part of a learning team on the student's behalf rather than an antagonist who tests results.

Traditional teacher training is not designed to develop this kind of teacher, and the Teacher Corps was willing to make possible such a departure with the special population revolving around corrections. The model was adapted to prepare this new type of teacher for dealing with persons in correctional institutions, and in communities where pre-trial diversion would have the greatest effect. Selection of persons for teacher preparation emphasized the similarity of their life experiences to those of the targeted student population. The program staff engaged to prepare these individuals for teaching was similarly chosen for ability to relate to the persons involved as well as for professional capability.

Program Problems

Forty interns/inmates (ten at each site) were selected, and professional staff were hired at each site. A national director was appointed at the Union central office. Each intern was to teach a number of other people as part of his program of study. Difficulties arise in any program, such as differences among persons involved, which need not be discussed here. However, there are a number of problems of special concern in this program.

First, the interns were not viewed by correctional authorities primarily as students but as inmates. Limitations were levied on educational opportunities, times and places of study, resource and material acquisition, and direct contact with facilitators and other experts. Students did not have access to fellow learners in an intellectually unconstrained environment, and noise levels, schedules, and contacts with peers were not conducive to learning. The UWW mode adapts well to these constraints but cannot overcome all the shortcomings.

Second, administrators presented major obstacles due to their own backgrounds, training and orientation. Custody and security concerns rather than inmate welfare or rehabilitation were paramount. Early in the program before any substantial progress could be made, these anxieties had to be decreased. This doubtless is a function not merely of administrators' personal feelings, but the emphasis of the system itself: rehabilitation, education, and welfare may accrue to the benefit of an official, but custody, security, and smooth operation of the facility will make or break him with his superiors. In order to deal with these matters, strategies were developed to convince administrators that infractions, escapes, and disturbances would be *less* likely as a result of the program's impact. The approach was to present the program to administrators as a tension-reducer in which inmates would become personally invested.

Third, correctional officers (formally termed "guards") can develop strong negative feelings against programs which offer inmates something they themselves are denied. These personnel typically have relatively little education, very modest incomes, and meager prospects. In their view, crime appears to pay when inmates are offered special programs leading to bachelor degrees while they as workers have sparse opportunities to go to college. The program was open to correctional officers but the Teacher Corps would not allow them to participate if they remained as full-time employees. The program could offer each intern $90 per week and an additional $15 for each dependent in addition to college tuition. Correctional officers found it difficult to give up their job security and income for a two-year time-limited program. Other methods to mitigate ill feeling were to involve the officers in intern selection, programmatic and decision-making, and other matters which gave them both information and validity.

Fourth, state teacher certification of inmates and ex-offenders presented difficulties in two states where persons who had committed felonies were automatically construed to be permanently guilty of moral turpitude. It has thus far proven impossible to reverse this general rule, but certification for all who needed it was granted on a case-by-case basis. The arguments which prevailed in this matter were that right to livelihood was being denied persons who should have full rights as citizens, and that to discriminate on the basis of felonious acts for which the penalty has been paid or to eliminate a person based upon a previous condition of servitude was unlawful.

Fifth, state correctional institutions administering the Teacher Corps stipends for inmate/interns withheld payment on a number of occasions. These actions reflected deep-seated attitudes against special treatment and payment of stipends to incarcerated persons. One possible remedy would be to have the educational institution handle disbursements. Another would be to involve the chief officials of the disbursing agency in the pre-training component and provide some on-going contact with program participants including those in institutions.

Finally, development of a competent staff willing to make a commitment to a two-year program funded by "soft money" is an inherent weakness in the granting process. Perhaps grants should be lengthened or an alternate system of developing new models should be developed nationally, but no single program can capably resolve that issue.

Program Progress

Although merely a dent in a system which needs drastic change in the areas which do not require being totally abolished, the program can cite areas of progress.

- There are the minute, but necessary relaxations of custodial concerns on the part of wardens and others. On three sites inmates were allowed access to UWW activities previously denied, and one off-duty correctional officer (also a UWW student) was permitted

to escort an inmate/student to outside classes. Inmate/students were permitted to travel out of state for a three-day program workshop and conference at Union Headquarters in August, 1974. And wardens unanimously supported continuation of the program beyond the initial Teacher Corps funding period, despite their earlier opposition.

- One inmate/student has assisted 100 fellow inmates at Sandstone in passing either the Adult Basic Education (ABE) or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) test requirements. None of these inmates had previously indicated interest in educational programs offered by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The same person has written a partly-autobiographical book on Juvenile Delinquency which has been accepted by a publisher and will appear this year.

- An inmate/student has developed an educational technique to teach basic reading skills to adults who are functioning below the 6th grade level and bring them up to the 9th grade level to meet ABE test requirements. He is currently in discussion with a large corporation concerning the purchase of this model.

- An inmate/intern was permitted to continue student-teaching at a public school despite a lock-up of all inmates due to a prison escape and ensuing murders. The superintendent, principal and community so strongly supported his continuing despite a universal ban, that the warden relented and the student continued his student-teaching.

- Two inmate/interns are working in a youth correctional facility preparing 14-16 year-olds previously functioning below the 6th grade level to pass the GED. Since learning that seventeen youths had passed the GED in the first eight months of this intensive involvement, certified teachers have been observing their techniques for helping the youngsters to achieve.

- The Baltimore Public School System has agreed to accept interns for regular teaching placement upon their graduation. This is recognition of the student's special program training and qualifications, and guarantees employment consonant with their preparation in the degree program.

- Three interns have completed their learning programs and have been awarded their degrees before the two-year funding period ended, and have experienced no difficulties in finding employment.

- Staff from four sites have become knowledgeable first-line managers within the correctional education area, which generally lacks such qualified personnel. In these programs and others, they will continue to have a significant impact. For example, one site director has assumed a position as State Liaison Coordinator of the Corrections Education Project of the Education Commission of the States.

- The program has demonstrated that it can have success even within the constraints of the penal system, and that it can have effects on that system which accrue to later programs, inmates, correctional personnel, and society.

- The program has demonstrated that its educational methodologies can assist students to develop the skills to be effective in teaching others, and especially others who are viewed as problem learners.

- The program has demonstrated that its students and graduates will be able to bring direct benefits to their communities in arenas of great need. Further, community agencies such as school systems will hire graduates as professional teachers, granting them regular full-time paid positions.

- One inmate/intern was invited as a panel participant at the National Conference on Higher Education in Chicago in March of this year. This is the first such conference to include a formal discussion of education in correctional institutions. It is expected that further recognition of correctional education will be highlighted by similar features in subsequent conferences.

Program Status

At the end of the two-year Teacher Corps funding period, each of the four sites will be required to determine if it will continue to operate, and if so in what fashion. The Colorado unit has applied for an additional grant to mount a community-based effort modeled after the program which has evolved there under the initial grant. The Maryland unit is preparing to become involved in the introduction of UWW techniques in the new Department of Corrections School District in that state. The Minnesota unit has added a permanent University-funded position of "corrections coordinator" with the responsibility of developing a permanent corrections component supported directly by the budget. The Rhode Island unit has applied for Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) funding to design a follow-up program, has sought assistance from a state budget increase, and will spin off an ex-offender-administered half-way house facility, "The Street," which developed in cooperation with the initial program.

The Union's Commitment to Correctional Education

The Union has made a strong commitment to correctional education programs, and is attempting to join with its member institutions to develop new strategies for meeting this great social need. It has applied for additional Teacher Corps funds to concentrate a program in Ohio, and will continue to support similar activities in other states as outlined above.

More important, the Union recognizes that a large national effort is necessary beyond such individual programs if appropriate impact is to be achieved. It is currently developing a National Institute of Correctional Education, based upon the experiences of

the UWW-Teacher Corps Corrections Project and various UWW units of member institutions. The Institute will direct its energies to the educational needs of inmates, ex-offenders and others who need special allocations of time and resources in order to complete college-level work.

Of equal import, the Institute will address the needs of workers in the criminal justice system such as wardens, probation officers, correctional officers, counselors, and community residents who want to work in correctional settings. It will utilize diverse resources from the community, and will especially involve prestigious persons from the judiciary, universities, law schools, ranking political and law enforcement personnel, attorneys, community leaders, media persons, societal analysts, and others willing to make a commitment to correctional education and able to share useful expertise with non-traditional learners. Students from across the country will have available to them academic experiential programs, culminating in the GED, AA, BA, MA, and PhD when development is complete. By September, 1975 the bachelor's level programs will be available and the others will be in active development.

The National Institute of Correctional Education (NICE) will give priority for admission to persons directly involved in corrections, and especially those in a position to have significant immediate impact. Direct contact with staff and inmates across whole institutions is a preferred mode of operation.

The Union recognizes the problems and possible progress in correctional education, and has committed itself, especially through the Institute, to attempting through educational means to have significant impact on the half-million persons now involved directly with correctional institutions.

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Further Information

For further information concerning the Union's Teacher Corps Corrections Program, contact the author or the following:

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For further information covering setting up a similar program through the Teacher Corps under Public Law 90-35, contact: Clarence Walker, Teacher Corps/ USOE/HEW 400 Maryland Ave., Washington, D.C.

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